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### **Easing the Transition from Prison to the Community: An Evaluation of a *Second Chance Act* Mentoring Grant**

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**Abstract:** Mentoring has increasingly become a standard component of many prisoner reentry programs. Due to the low cost of mentoring in a time of strained correctional budgets, mentoring has become a viable element to assist offenders in their journey back home from prison. Although mentoring has long been utilized with at-risk and criminal justice involved youths, mentoring with adult offender populations is a relatively new phenomenon with little extensive research conducted on its effectiveness in reducing recidivism and increasing quality of life issues, such as employment and housing. Utilizing data from a program recipient of a *Second Chance Act* mentoring grant, we assess the impact of mentoring on reincarceration, the obtainment of employment and permanent housing, and access to mental health treatment. The findings suggest that mentoring may be successful in lowering the reincarceration rates of participants as well as increasing their chances of obtaining employment and securing permanent housing. However, mentoring did not result in many participants partaking in mental health services. Overall, this adds to the limited research showing the effectiveness of mentoring in helping ease the transition from prison back to the community for adult offenders.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mentoring has increasingly become part of the arsenal of services provided to at-risk populations to reduce their likelihood of recidivism, with it often utilized to help ease the difficult transition from prison back into the community (Brown & Ross, 2010; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Finnegan, Whitehurst, & Deaton, 2010; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007; Lewis, Maguire, Raynor, Vanstone, & Vennard, 2007; Rhodes, 1994; Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, Eck, Reuter, & Bushway, 1998). Within the realm of criminal justice, it is believed that mentors may provide individuals with social capital or with a positive role model to whom they can become attached to, use as a source of emotional support providing guidance, encouragement, and advice, and who can serve as a broker of resources helping the offender navigate the process of reentry (e.g., assistance with finding housing, employment, mental health services) (Brown & Ross, 2010; Finnegan et al., 2010; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007; Lewis et al., 2007; Nellis, 2002). Consequently, mentoring has become one tool in which to not only reduce the recidivism of offenders, but also help offenders become productive members of society (Brown & Ross, 2010).

Although mentoring is often included as a component of many reentry initiatives, extant research has not been conducted on its effectiveness concerning the reduction of post-release recidivism and in increasing social capital by providing a network of assistance for adult offenders. Rather, much research has focused on the effects of mentoring with at-risk or criminal justice involved youths (Becker, 1994; DuBois et al., 2002; Newburn & Shiner, 2005; Sherman et al., 1998). However, few studies with adult offenders suggest that mentoring may be a promising component in facilitating successful reentry with newly

freed inmates by providing social capital (Brown & Ross, 2010; Farrall, 2004; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2007; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Social capital in mentoring programs involves the social networks and connections amongst individuals that link them to prosocial relationships, resources, and opportunities (e.g. employment), civil participation in communities, and relationships of trust (Farrall, 2004). For example, a mentoring program with female offenders in Victoria, Australia found that mentors often served as references for housing and employment, assisted with court hearings, helped find transportation for medical and mental health treatment, and were seen as a friend in which the newly freed offender could be themselves and try out their new prosocial identity in a non-judgmental relationship. In essence, mentorship in this case provided social capital which assisted the offender in the navigating the various obstacles and collateral consequences faced by reentering individuals (Brown & Ross, 2010).

Rather than focusing on the social capital gained by mentoring, the majority of the limited body of research on adult mentoring has focused on its impact on obtaining employment after release (Bauldry, Korom-Djakovic, McClanahan, McMaken, & Kotloff, 2009; Fletcher, Sherk, & Jucovy, 2009; Leenhouts, 2003; Lewis et al., 2007). The Ready4Work Initiative (Bauldry et al., 2009; Fletcher et al., 2009), which sought to provide wrap-around services to increase the employment of returning offenders, utilized mentoring as a crucial component in their reintegration services. An evaluation of this program found those that participated in the mentoring portion of the program were more likely to remain in the reentry program, obtain and maintain employment, and showed lower recidivism rates after one year than those who did not participate in

mentoring (Bauldry et al., 2009; Fletcher et al., 2009).

Mentoring, therefore, has shown promise as a component of comprehensive reentry plans for offenders. Due to the low costs of having volunteer mentors and the decreasing budgets and resources faced by the correctional system, mentoring has become an even more attractive option for the criminal justice system to utilize when reintegrating individuals from the prison back into the community. This study hopes to add to the literature on the effectiveness of mentoring. Specifically, the impact that mentoring has on both quality of life issues (e.g., housing, employment) as well as recidivism are examined.

### **Returning Home: From the Prison Cell Back to the Community**

Although the U.S. prison population has decreased for two consecutive years, by yearend 2011 roughly 1.6 million Americans were serving time in state and federal prison institutions. This staggering number corresponds to the highest imprisonment rate in the world of 492 per 100,000 U.S. residents or to 1 in every 107 U.S. adults currently serving time in a prison facility (Carson & Sabol, 2012; Glaze & Parks, 2012). While many scholars have discussed the enormity and the causes of this mass incarceration movement (Abramsky, 2007; Bosworth, 2010; Clear, 1994; Currie 1985, 1998; Garland, 2001; Lynch, 2007; Pew Center on the States, 2008; Pratt, 2009), many did not foretell a major consequence of America's commitment to mass incarceration as a response to controlling crime: the abundant number of those who would eventually be released annually back into the community.

In 2011 alone, 688,384 prisoners stepped forth from their prison cells and returned back to their communities, with roughly 110,000 released in California alone

(Caron & Sabol, 2012; see also Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). Even more telling, in the decade spanning from 2001 to 2011, over 7.5 million offenders had been freed from state and federal prisons with over 1,600 offenders being released on a daily basis (Carson & Sabol, 2012; Petersilia, 2003; Useem & Piehl, 2008). With at least 95% of all state prisoners eventually returning back to their neighborhoods, it is imperative to thoroughly understand the issues and challenges of prisoner reentry and to determine how to successfully facilitate their reintegration back into society (Hughes & Wilson, 2003; Mallenhoff, 2009; Useem & Piehl, 2008; Visher & Travis, 2003). In essence, we need to provide the necessary resources and skills to ease the transition from being a "convict" to an "ex-con" to help halt the "revolving door of justice" (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2000, 2005).

### **"THE REVOLVING DOOR:" Recidivism and Obstacles Faced by "Ex-Cons"**

#### **What a Difference (or Not) Three Years Can Make**

To date, the most commonly cited recidivism statistics have been drawn from three studies conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, with each showing less than promising results for the specific deterrent argument that imprisonment reduces future criminal behavior (Beck & Shipley, 1989; Langan & Levin, 2002; Sabol, Adams, Parthasarathy, & Yuan, 2000). Beginning with Beck and Shipley's (1989) analysis of 108,508 state prisoners released from 11 states in 1983, it was discovered that the reoffending rates of newly released offenders are shockingly high. Within three years of release, 62.5% of the inmates had been rearrested, 46.8% had been reconvicted, and 41.4% were reincarcerated. Replicating Beck and

Shipley (1989), Langan and Levin (2002) tracked the recidivism rates of over 270,000 offenders released from 15 states in 1994. Similarly to their predecessors, Langan and Levin uncovered remarkably high reoffending rates within three years post release: 67.5% percent were rearrested, 46.9% were reconvicted, and 51.8% were reincarcerated for either a new crime or a technical violation.

Although much lower in magnitude, substantial recidivism rates are still found when examining the post-release reoffending of federal inmates. Sabol et al. (2000) followed more than 215,000 released inmates between 1986 and 1994. They discovered that overall 16% of offenders returned to federal prisons within three years. Furthermore, the percentage of inmates returning to prison within the three-year timeframe increased more than 6% between the 1986 (11.4%) and 1994 (18.6%) cohorts. Thus, almost one-fifth of all federal inmates find themselves back behind bars shortly after they have been freed.

In 2011, the Pew Center on the States published the most comprehensive study to date on recidivism in the U.S. Examining the recidivism rates of released prisoners from 33 states in 1999 and from 41 states in 2004, it was revealed that a large percentage of released inmates return to a prison cell within three years of release. Specifically, 45.4% of those released in 1999 and 43.3% of those freed in 2004 were reimprisoned within three years for either a new crime or technical violation (Pew Center on the States, 2011). Thus, from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s the reincarceration rates of prisons have been relatively stable, fluctuating between 40% and 50%, suggesting that prisons alone are not fully curbing the reoffending of offenders.

### **Why the Door Keeps Spinning**

Why is there a revolving door among the American correctional enterprise, with almost half of our annual released prison population returning within three years? What obstacles and barriers do returning prisoners face that make their reintegration back to society such a difficult transition? Many scholars have tackled these questions have come to a variety of conclusions, ranging anywhere from substance abuse and mental health problems, to the continuing of medication regimens and psychiatric care, to difficulty obtaining employment and stable housing, to reestablishing bonds to family members, to name only a few (Corrections Compendium, 2011; Hammett, Roberts, & Kennedy, 2001; Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2004; Meatraux & Culhane, 2004; National Commission on Correctional Health Care, 2002; National Reentry Resource Center, 2013; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). Consequently, there is a consistent finding the transition from prisoner to free person is a challenging one to navigate with many impediments hindering the process.

Released inmates face a variety of issues, with the rate of mental illness two to four times higher in the prison population than among the general population. Furthermore, over 75% of the released prison population has a substance abuse problem (Hammett et al., 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005). It is thus imperative that a continuity of care be continued once an offender leaves the prison gates, meaning that treatments, therapy, and medication regimens must have a smooth transition from behind the prison walls into the community (La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004; Visher, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004). However, many states do not provide that seamless continuity of care. Concerning prescriptions, the state prison systems vary widely with some states not giving any medication to released inmates (Virginia) or

only providing them what is remaining in their prescription (Rhode Island and Kentucky). Other states provide medications ranging from seven days to 60 days (Corrections Compendium, 2011). This often serves as a major source of anxiety for inmates as they must schedule a psychiatric appointment quickly after release to maintain their medical regimen. Furthermore, these medications have often stabled out the offender's problematic behavior and a lapse in taking the proper medication may contribute to their reoffending rates.

A second issue often faced by released inmates is obtaining housing and employment (La Vigne et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2005; Visher et al., 2004). Those who cannot find housing and who are forced to enter homeless shelters have been shown to have higher rates of recidivism than those who can find housing (Mextraux & Culhane, 2004). Furthermore, a felony conviction, particularly a sex crime conviction, can severely limit housing options and as well employment of offenders (Holzer, 1996, 2007; Mextraux & Culhane, 2004; Pager, 2003, 2007). Landlords and employers alike often view released felons as dangerous, untrustworthy, and risky prospects and thus often are unwilling or hesitant to lease or hire these offenders. Their time behind bars is like a "mark" on the individual that impedes offenders from obtaining gainful employment or housing once released, which is often extremely detrimental as it hinders these inmates from finding a source of legitimate income and a sense of stability and is often a condition of post-release supervision (Holzer, 1996, 2007; Mextraux & Culhane, 2004; Pager, 2003, 2007).

### **Second Chance Act of 2008**

In order to help overcome the reentry barriers facing the over 600,000 released state and federal prisoners and 9 million people freed from jails annually, the Federal government drafted the *Second Chance Act of 2008*. This updated the *Second Chance Act of 2007*, which revised the *Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968* to focus more on reentry services, particularly in the areas of employment, mentorship, housing, substance abuse and mental health, and family reunification. The Act also authorized the creation of the National Re-Entry Resource Center (*Second Chance Act*, Public Law 110-199).

The goal of the *Second Chance Act*, which was signed into law by President Bush on April 9, 2008 with bipartisan support, is to provide federal grants to agencies and nonprofit organizations to facilitate the successful reentry of returning adult and juvenile offenders. The Act provides funds for demonstration grants that try to implement comprehensive reentry initiatives, co-occurring grants that provide money for offenders with both substance abuse and mental health problems, family-based substance abuse treatment programs, reentry courts, technology careers training grants, recidivism reduction grants, smart probation grants, and mentorship grants, which is the focus of this study. Since 2009, over 300 governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations from 48 states have received funding stemming from the *Second Chance Act* (Justice Center, The Council of State Governments, 2013). Furthermore, the Act continues to receive support from both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In October 2012, \$58 million was committed to the *Second Chance Act* by the Department of Justice to continue to facilitate reentry programs (Center for Social Policy, 2012).

### **Second Chance Mentoring Program**

On October 1, 2010, Catholic Charities of Northern Kentucky was awarded \$300,000 over a two-year period by the Bureau of Justice Assistance to create and implement a mentor program for adult offenders released back into the Northern Kentucky region. Catholic Charities was a good fit for this program because they already housed a variety of social justice oriented programs including: substance abuse and mental health services; jail ministry; and a reentry program specifically designed for female ex-offenders returning to the community with the co-occurring disorders of substance addiction and mental illness. The Second Chance mentoring grant was utilized to fund a mentorship program that began while the offender was incarcerated and continued upon the offender's release. It was hoped that by having a mentor, the offender's release back into society would be eased by having a resource to help broker services and serve as a prosocial influence on the offender's life once they return to the community.

Both the grant and Catholic Charities required mentors to make pre-release contact with the offender, through phone calls, letters, and visits, and then maintain that contact during and after the offender's transition back into society. Specifically, for Catholic Charities of Northern Kentucky, the pre-release contact should begin six months pre-release and continue roughly six months after release. Once released, Catholic Charities had a detailed timeline of mentoring functions: within one week, the mentor and released offender should meet to schedule future meetings; within one month, the mentee should be meeting with their parole officer, have temporary housing, be seeking employment, and attending recommended counseling programs; within three months, the mentee should be employed, have semi-permanent or

permanent housing, be in compliance with his/her parole officer, and participate in community activities; finally, by six months post-release, the mentee should have permanent housing, a life plan, and be in the process of completing the mentorship program. It is the role of the mentor to help facilitate these goals by directing the mentee to the proper services and resources and to be a good influence on the offender.

The grant also states that mentors should receive the proper training in order to be an effective mentor. Specifically, mentors must be trained on the criminal justice system, the reentry process, and offender issues. Furthermore, mentors must be educated on victim-related issues, available services and referral procedures, interpersonal communication, and on safety issues.

Additionally, Catholic Charities of Northern Kentucky set out the following intended implementation of their program. First, they sought to target moderate- to high-risk offenders, as this conforms to the current empirical research on effective correctional interventions and the risk-need-responsivity (R-N-R) model (Andrews, 1995; Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau, 1996). Extant research has shown interventions with low-risk individuals often results iatrogenic or criminogenic effects, while focused rehabilitative efforts with moderate- to high-risk individuals show a reduction in recidivism (Andrews, 1995; Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Gendreau, 1996). Second, Catholic Charities sought to begin mentorship six months pre-release by having offenders fill out applications and submitting them to a program coordinator for review. It was hoped that 50 offenders would take part in the mentoring program after the first year and 50 after the second. Third, mentors were to be recruited by the community and then given the necessary training required by the grant conditions.

The overarching goal of this mentorship program was to reduce the recidivism and improve quality of life outcomes of those returning to the community after prison. Specifically, it is hypothesized that having a mentor who can provide assistance and direct the mentee to the proper resources concerning employment, housing, mental health treatment, as well as the mentor serving as a prosocial influence and source of emotional support, would reduce the exposure to known criminogenic influences and situations which would ultimately reduce the mentee's chance of reincarceration. This evaluation seeks to examine the implementation of this program and to determine if mentorship had a substantial impact on the post-release behavior of offenders.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. How closely was the program implemented to its original intention?
2. Does participation in a mentor program improve one's opportunity to gain employment, housing, and access to mental health treatment?
3. Does participation in a mentor program decrease one's chance of being reincarcerated?

## **METHODS**

Data were gathered from a variety of sources. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the program director, a mentor, and the case manager. These interviews were utilized to gain a better understanding of how the program was implemented. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted one on one with one of the two researchers in a closed door office or conference room at Catholic Charities. The researchers took notes as they conducted the

interviews and recording devices were not used.

In January 2013, program records were accessed to obtain demographic information such as race, age, ethnicity, and gender on the 62 mentees who participated in the program from January 2011 to December 2012. Furthermore, these documents were utilized to gather data on whether a participant was involved in the program during pre-release only, post-release only or both pre- and post-release as well as how many months mentees participated in the program. Program records also provided data on whether a participant successfully gained employment and housing and whether they participated in mental health treatment. In January 2013, the program director collected data on official measures of reincarceration, specifically the return to prison, utilizing the Department of Corrections (in the program's home state) database.

## **Independent Variable**

The independent variable, participation in the mentorship program, was used to better understand the differences between those who participated in the program prerelease only, post-release only or both pre- and post-release. This variable was measured as 0 for those who participated in prerelease only, 1 for post-release only and 2 for both pre- and post-release.

## **Dependent Variables**

Only those who completed the post-release portion of the program (post-release only or pre- and post-release) were discussed when examining quality of life outcomes, such as employment, housing, and access to mental health treatment. This decision was made because quality of life outcomes were only discussed preliminarily between the mentor and mentee, while the mentee was still incarcerated. However,

these quality of life outcomes become the primary focus once the mentee was released. The first dependent variable, employment, was used to better understand if those who participated in the post-release portion of the program were able to obtain employment and was coded as 0 for unemployed and 1 for employed. Housing also was examined to determine if those who participated in the post-release portion of the program were living in temporary or permanent housing. Housing was coded as 0 for homeless, 1 for temporary housing, and 2 for permanent housing. Mental health treatment also was examined to determine if those who participated in the post-release portion of the program were utilizing mental health services and was coded as 0 for receiving no mental health services and 1 for receiving mental health services.

The last dependent variable, reincarceration, also was examined to see if those who participated in the program prerelease only, post release only, or pre and post release were returned to prison and why. This variable was coded as not reincarcerated (0), returned for parole violation (1), returned for new crime (2), absconded (3), and returned for outstanding warrant (4).

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from the interviews conducted with the program director, mentor, and case manager were examined to gain a better understanding of how the program was implemented. These interviews were used to provide deeper insight into the program from the perspective of the staff who was working directly with it.

Quantitative data were collected and entered into SPSS for data analysis. Descriptive statistics based on gender, age, race, and ethnicity were used to provide an overview of the participants involved in the

study. Recidivism and quality of life outcomes such as employment, housing, and access to mental health treatment were examined using cross tabulations to better understand their interaction with the dependent variable participation in the mentoring program. When examining quality of life outcomes these cross tabulations helped to identify similarities and differences between those who participated post-release only or both pre- and post-release, while reincarceration was examined comparing differences between those who participated prerelease only, post release only or both pre and post release.

## **RESULTS**

### **Program Implementation**

#### ***Mentors & Mentees: Recruitment, Training & Mentoring***

Between January 2010 and December 2012, 132 moderate- to high-risk offenders applied to participate in the mentor program. Seventy of these applicants were denied access to the program for one or more of the following reasons: not returning to the Northern Kentucky area upon release; prior sex offense conviction; or ineligible for parole/release within the next six months. However, there were 62 successful matches, which were defined as the mentor and mentee having contact (meeting face-to-face, exchanging letters, or phone calls) two or more times. In 2011, there were 30 mentees who were matched with mentors and in 2012 an additional 32 mentees were matched with a mentor.

The program coordinator was originally supposed to recruit participants from the prison system utilizing the reentry coordinators at each of the institutions, but not all of the coordinators have been receptive. The program coordinator has been teaching a course on fatherhood within a couple of local county jails and has been advertising the mentor program during these



classes. This has resulted in some of the jail inmates participating in the program upon release. There also have been participants who have found out about the program from their probation/parole officer or from the halfway house staff where they were staying. The program was not actively recruiting female participants because there was another established program within Catholic Charities that specifically targeted females with substance abuse and/or mental illness reentering the community.

The program coordinator recruited mentors using a local parish newsletter, radio advertisement and the newspaper. The mentors were all members of the parish, where the newsletter was distributed. There were a total of seven mentors, six male and one female, working with the program. All of the mentors working with the program were retirees who attended the local parish. Therefore, there was little diversity among the mentors. Mentors and mentees were matched based on need and not common interests. The program director matched mentors and mentees based on the past experience and success of the mentor and the risk level of the mentee, so higher risk mentees were placed with more experienced and successful mentors.

The target goal was to have each mentor matched with five mentees who were at various stages of release and involvement with the program. Currently, most mentors have fewer mentees than their target goal. One mentor who was interviewed, for example, had been matched with four mentees throughout the year, but was only currently working with two of them.

All new mentors received an initial training that included the following topics: how to be a good listener; motivation; how to interpret and understand the reentry plan; family reunification; as well as risks and needs. Each mentor also received a handbook that addressed the mentor's job

description, professional boundaries, participant risks and needs, mentoring expectations, the reentry plan, and a mentoring timeline. Additional trainings were offered throughout the year and mentors were encouraged to attend these as a refresher. A current mentor stated he had attended four, two to three hour training sessions in the past year on the following topics: the criminal justice system, the parole system, unique issues returning ex-offenders face as well as family reunification.

The program coordinator also met with the mentors as a group on a monthly basis to discuss day to day operations and paperwork. These monthly meetings also provided the mentors the opportunity to discuss their cases, successes, and concerns with the group. The program coordinator also stayed in touch with the mentors between monthly meetings via email.

Mentors typically wrote to their mentees, while they were incarcerated, every two to three weeks to establish a rapport and spoke with them on the phone once close to their release date to discuss meeting in the community. The mentor who was interviewed had visited with one mentee at the prison, but this was not typical due to the many restrictions placed on inmate visitations (time, day, etc.) and the rural location of the prisons. Once in the community, mentors and mentees met twice a week in person and spoke over the phone once a week.

During their time together, the mentors encouraged the mentees to attend twelve step drug and alcohol programs, church, and anger management courses as well as engage in healthy physical activity. Mentors showed mentees how to access services in the community, such as free computer access at public libraries and advocated on their behalf in court, for example, writing letters of support in child support cases.

Mentors also assisted with transportation to and from services and helped to coordinate with larger Catholic Charities' initiatives, such as putting together wish lists for the annual Christmas drive.

### *Creation of Reentry Plans*

A full time case manager was hired to work with the program, in September 2012. Prior to her arrival, the reentry plans were being created by mentors or case managers who were working on an hourly basis. Although, the original intention had been to create the reentry plan prior to one's release from the prison system, this had not been happening. The logistics of how inmates were released, for example, being denied release by parole board, potential participants deciding to move to a different area or not being able to obtain an exact release date has made it difficult for the case managers to create a reentry plans with potential participants prior to their release. Several participants also learned about the program outside of prison from other sources, such as from their probation/parole officer or from the halfway house where they were staying.

The current full time case manager had been meeting with mentees to complete an initial assessment within a couple of days to one week after release. She has created a filing system and standardized forms to be completed with each mentee, which were adapted from the women's reentry program also housed within Catholic Charities. When determining what additional services were needed, the case manager begins by going through the mentee service plan form with each mentee, during their initial visit. At this time she works with the mentee to determine their goals and objectives. The mentee service plan form allows her to discuss with the mentee the focus areas of housing, sobriety, mental health, employment, self-sufficiency, education,

community support resources, physical health, legal requirements, and any additional areas of concern for the individual mentee. Next, she creates an individualized reentry plan using the information gathered from this first meeting, intake form, and the initial application to be accepted into the program.

The case manager set small goals for the mentee, so they were able to see and celebrate their achievements as they progressed. If a mentee, for example, went to a halfway house upon being placed on parole, then his goal was to maintain housing and the objective was to follow the house rules. After this goal has been met, she will create a new goal for the mentee to obtain. She also discussed mental health concerns with each mentee at the initial interview and introduced what services were available. The goal for this area often included discussing matters such as stress and working through feelings. The mentee's objective was to contact her for services, if they were needed. If a mentee does not disclose much about one's self in the initial meeting, she utilized a self-assessment tool that examined strengths and weaknesses.

The case manager begins by seeing mentees once a week. Once the mentee was employed she saw him biweekly. She prefers to meet with them face to face, but even when they call to cancel she will try to help them as much as possible with their needs over the phone. She continued to meet with the mentees until they were no longer in need of the program, but made it clear they can come back to meet with her at any point, even when they are no longer participating in the program.

The grant specified that grant money could not be used for any type of rewards for mentees, so the case manager has found creative ways to encourage and acknowledge accomplishments. The case manager opened a food pantry at a local

church and has been using items from the pantry as part of a reward system. Once a mentee met a goal, for example, as a reward she helped him by providing groceries or hygiene products from the pantry. This generosity has helped to serve two purposes. First, it provided a reward system to encourage mentees to meet their goals. Second, the items from the pantry also served to fill in the gaps for those being released from prison. Those who were staying at a local halfway house, for example, must bring their own hygiene products along with a towel and washcloth. Most do not have the money to purchase these items upon release from prison and got into trouble with the halfway house staff when they used paper towels instead. The case manager helped mentees to overcome this barrier by providing towels and washcloths when they met a goal. She also helped mentees with cleaning items when they obtained their own permanent housing. Recently, the program began purchasing bus tickets to assist with transportation. These bus passes also were being used to help reward and acknowledge program achievements.

### ***Employment & Housing***

The program director has been able to connect mentees with employment services through local community agencies. However, these programs require mentees to attend a couple of weeks of trainings and assessments to help improve their chances in the job market. The majority of mentees have not been interested in participating in these programs because they were looking for immediate employment, while others have had a difficult time attending due to conflicts with their schedules at the halfway house. The program director has been able to use his personal connections to assist

mentees in obtaining jobs they were able to start right away, but these jobs typically paid minimum wage and did not provide a living wage. The program director noted most of the mentees had their GED and many had trade skills, such as carpentry and plumbing that could be utilized for higher pay. Obtaining housing was difficult as well. Halfway houses were being utilized to assist with the transition to the community, but this was not permanent housing. The program coordinator and case manager relied primarily on the program coordinator's limited contacts with landlords who were willing to rent rooms to mentees.

### ***Mentee Characteristics***

The overwhelming majority of participants were male (82%), white (84%), and non-Hispanic (98%). The average age of a participant was 34 years with most between the ages of 20-29 (36%) or 30-39 (31%). The mentees were recruited from a variety of places with most being recruited from the prison (69%), followed by the jail (21%), probation/parole (7%), and a halfway house (3%) (See Table 1).

Participation in the program varied with 45% of the mentees involved in the pre-release portion of the program only, 27.5% in the post-release portion only, and 27.5% in both the pre-release and post-release segments (See Table 1). Most that participated in the pre-release portion of the program, both pre-release only and pre- and post-release, were actively involved with the program for 3-4 months prior to their release from incarceration. Those who participated in the post-release portion of the program only, mostly stayed in the program between 5-6 months, while those who participated in both pre- and post-release were divided with 43% staying between 1-2 months and 36% for 5-6 months.

**Table 1. Sample Characteristics**

Mentee Characteristics	Mean/Percentage
Sex (percent male)	82.0%
Race	
White	84.0%
Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic	98.0%
Age (in years)	34
Recruited from	
Prison	69.0%
Jail	21.0%
Probation/Parole	7.0%
Halfway House	3.0%
Participation	
Pre-Release Only	45.0%
Post-Release Only	27.5%
Pre- and Post-Release	27.5%
N=62	

***Quality of Life Outcomes***

A total of 62 mentees participated in the program, but only 34 of these mentees participated in the post-release portion of the program. Therefore, only the 34 mentees who completed the post release portion of the program (post-release only or pre- and post-release) are discussed when examining quality of life outcomes. Most (56%) of those who participated in the post-release portion of the program were employed prior to leaving the program. Those who participated in both the pre-release and post-release halves of the program were the most likely to be employed (65%). The majority of participants were living in permanent

housing (74%) with only 26% living in temporary housing. No one was homeless and those in temporary housing were living in a halfway house for substance abuse treatment. The number of mentees living in permanent housing increased to 82% when only examining those who participated in both the pre- and post-release portions of the program. Very few mentees accessed mental health treatment, although resources had been set aside within the program's budget for these services. Only 4 participants, 2 post-release only and 2 pre- and post-release, utilized mental health services through the mentor program (See Table 1).

**Table 2.** Cross tabulation for quality of life outcomes and participation in reentry mentor program

	Post release only	Pre and post release	Total
<i>Employment</i>			
Employed	47% (n=8)	65% (n=11)	56% (n=19)
Unemployed	53% (n=9)	35% (n=6)	44% (n=15)
Total	100% (n=17)	100% (n= 17)	100% (n=34)
<i>Housing</i>			
Permanent	65% (n=11)	82% (n=14)	74% (n=25)
Temporary	35% (n=6)	18% (n=3)	26% (n=9)
Homeless	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)
Total	100% (n=17)	100% (n=17)	100% (n=34)
<i>Mental Health</i>			
Accessed	12% (n=2)	12% (n=2)	12% (n=4)
Did not access	88% (n=15)	88% (n=15)	88% (n=30)
Total	100% (n=17)	100% (n=17)	100% (n=34)

***Reincarceration***

Although a total of 62 mentees participated in the program, 10 were never released on parole and remained in prison, while 4 were released to areas outside of Northern Kentucky and were no longer eligible for the program. Therefore, only 48 of the total participants are examined when discussing reincarceration or one’s return to prison. The majority (73%) of participants have not been reincarcerated as of December 31, 2012. Those who participated in the pre-release only segment of the program were

the least likely to return to prison with only 14% violating parole. Seventy-one percent of those who participated in the post-release only portion of the program remained out of prison, with 24% returning for parole violations and an additional 5% returning for committing a new crime. Only 64% of those who participated in both the pre- and post-release halves of the program remained out of prison, while 12% absconded, 18% returned for parole violation and 6% were returned due to an outstanding warrant prior to one’s program participation.

**Table 3.** Cross tabulation for reincarceration and participation in reentry mentor program

	Prerelease	Post release	Pre & post-release	Total
<i>Reincarceration</i>				
Not reincarcerated	86% (n=12)	71% (n=12)	64% (n=11)	73% (n=35)
Parole violation	14% (n=2)	24% (n=4)	18% (n=3)	19% (n=9)
New Crime	0% (n=0)	5% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	2% (n=1)
Absconded	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	12% (n=2)	4% (n=2)
Outstanding warrant	0% (n=0)	0% (n=0)	6% (n=1)	2% (n=1)
Total	100% (n=14)	100% (n=17)	100% (n=17)	100% (n=48)

**DISCUSSION**

The primary purpose of the reentry plan was to provide a blueprint for both the mentor and mentee to explain what goals the mentee should be working towards and how they can be accomplished. The original intention of the program had been to have mentors create individualized reentry plans with mentees prior to their release from incarceration. Although the mentors were well trained, it became clear that asking them to create the reentry plan for their mentees would be too much. A case manager was hired to take on this task, but resigned shortly after. Part time case managers were utilized until a full time case manager was hired in September 2012. Since September 2012, the current case manager has been meeting with participants within a week of their release for an initial interview to assist with creating the individualized reentry plan. Once the participant is employed, the case manager meets with the mentee biweekly.

Research on case management has shown that consistent case management throughout one’s program participation is key to connecting clients with services effectively and reducing recidivism. Taxman (1998), for example, tracked 1,700 drug

offenders who were involved in a drug treatment program in Baltimore. Taxman concluded the program was successful in helping to decrease recidivism, in part, because they relied on systemic case management rather than individual case management. Individual case management was defined as a case manager meeting with a client, discussing their needs, and then referring them to treatment with little to no follow up. Systemic case management on the other hand, involves assessing the client’s needs, recommending services, and then continually meeting with the client as they progress through the program to celebrate progress and redefine goals (Taxman, 1998).

A second program evaluation conducted by Rossman, Gouvis, Buck, and Morley (1999) examined the Opportunity to Succeed program, which was created for substance abusing felons who had been released from prison. Those who participated in the Opportunity to Succeed Program were assigned a case manager who assessed their needs, referred them to treatment, and then met with them on a weekly basis. Clients met with the case manager less as they progressed through the

program. The authors concluded the clients viewed the case managers as advocates who were there when they needed them. It also was noted that the involvement of case managers throughout the program was important because service providers in the community may shut down or make substantial changes to their program (Rossman et al., 1999).

The current program has primarily relied on individual case management, where part time case managers were hired to create reentry plans. These part time case managers were unable to consistently meet with program participants to track their progress and update their reentry plans. The full time case manager was hired in September 2012, only three months prior to the end of data collection for this article. Therefore, it is unlikely the move towards systemic case management had an impact on the current results, but hopefully will help to encourage current and future participants to stay more connected to the mentor program and take advantage of all of the resources it has to offer regarding employment, housing and mental health.

## CONCLUSION

The *Second Chance Act of 2008* was signed into law on April 9, 2008. Many of the current reentry mentor programs were funded by this act and have only been in existence for two to three years. Therefore, it is difficult to compare the focus of this research study with other similar programs because few results have been published. However, initial publications on reentry mentor programs are positive. The Boston Reentry Initiative, for example, focuses on helping violent jail offenders to reenter their communities through mentoring, social services and career readiness (Braga, Piehl & Hureau, 2009). This particular program has seen significant recidivism reductions with a 30% reduction in arrests rates when

compared to the comparison group (Braga et al., 2009).

Initial findings for the Second Chance Mentor program are positive as well. The program has only been in existence for two years, so it is difficult to determine who (the program director, case manager and/or mentor) impacted mentees the most in terms of gaining employment, housing and staying out of prison. However, the program appears to be helping to address the issue of housing with no one in the program reporting homelessness and 74% of participants residing in permanent housing. Most participants (56%) also were able to obtain employment. Those who participated in both the pre-release and post-release portions of the program saw the greatest gains in employment and housing with 82% living in permanent housing and 65% being employed.

Recidivism results also appeared encouraging with 73% of the participants remaining in their communities and only 27% being reincarcerated by the end of the second year of the program. The current study only examines data for two years and not all who participated in the program have been in their communities for a total of two years. However, initial results seem to indicate participating in the mentor program helped to reduce recidivism.

As with most studies, the current study has limitations. First, a relatively small sample was used—62 mentees who participated in the reentry mentor program over a period of two years. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to other reentry mentor programs. We suggest this study be duplicated with other reentry mentor populations to examine if similar or different conclusions can be made. Second, the current study was unable to utilize random sampling due to program restrictions and a comparison group was not readily available. We suggest future studies utilize random

sampling whenever possible or a comparison group, if random sampling is not available. This will help to isolate the effects of the program on its participants and allow for stronger conclusions.

In closing, mentoring has been shown to be a valuable addition to various reentry programs. Our findings confirm those from earlier evaluations that mentoring can increase the obtainment of employment as well as decrease recidivism rates (Bauldry et al., 2009; Fletcher et al., 2009; Leenhouts, 2003; Lewis et al., 2007). Additionally, the program evaluated also discovered that mentoring was associated with a greater percentage of returning offenders securing permanent housing. Mentoring, therefore, with its low cost due to volunteer mentors and promising results, should continue to be evaluated and utilized to help an offender leave the prison and make the journey back home to the community.

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